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Expert questions rhetoric against S. Africa

By Miles Cunningham
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Chester Arthur Crocker, 43, the dapper assistant secretary of state who is the administration's top official on Africa, was not a universal favorite when named by President Reagan three-and-a-half years ago.

Sen. Jesse A. Helms, R-N.C., perhaps the best known conservative in Congress, held up Mr. Crocker's nomination for almost three months because of perceived ideological differences.

It took the intervention of Senate Majority Leader Howard H. Baker, R-Tenn., to allow the nomination process to go forward.

Then Mr. Helms accused Mr. Crocker of leaking secret government documents on policies toward South Africa and delayed the confirmation vote.

The Senate finally voted to confirm, 84-7, and Mr. Crocker took the oath of office on June 9, 1981 for the job he had been training most of his adult life to do. His credentials appear to be just what a government would want in a diplomat for that troubled part of the world.

Of South Africa, he once said: "That country is by its nature a part of the West. It is an integral and important element of the Western global, economic system."



Born in New York City, Mr. Crocker obtained a bachelor's degree at Ohio State University graduating cum laude, with distinction in history. At Johns Hopkins in the 1960s he earned his master's degree and a doctorate at the School of Advanced International Studies.

He served as the director of African Studies at the Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies 1976-81. There he was involved in research and policy analysis involving experts and leaders from the executive branch, from universities and African and other foreign countries.

He was an assistant and later associate professor of African political and international relations. At Georgetown he was a consultant to the State Department, the CIA, the Army War College and various commissions and private firms. Mr. Crocker did a stint as

news editor of Africa Report, a magazine, and he lectured on African government at American University.

He was on the staff of the National Security Council during the first Nixon administration, where he coordinated interagency policy studies and action papers involving Middle East, African and Indian Ocean issues. He is the author of South Africa Defense Posture, 1981, and he is found in Who's Who.

Mr. Crocker often testified before congressional committees on African affairs beginning with the Nigerian civil war in the 1960s and he was a regular at symposiums by government and private organizations.

Mr. Crocker has argued that exaggerated rhetoric and heavy criticism are not going to move Pretoria into the state of grace envisioned by Washington.

On occasion, he has managed to insert a timely note of calm. In September, for example, he made an unscheduled visit to Uganda where he evidently patched up a rift with the United States over human rights.

Mr. Crocker lives here with his wife, Saone Baron, and his three children, Bathsheba, Karena and Rebecca.